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CIA Reportedly Drew Plan to Oust Sandinistas

By Robert Parry
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Three years ago, as the administration assured Congress that ousting Nicaragua's leftist government was not a U.S. goal, CIA paramilitary officers prepared an ambitious plan to achieve that objective, according to U.S. officials.

One knowledgeable official, who spoke only on condition that he not be identified, said a timetable for overthrowing the Sandinista regime by the end of 1983 was written by senior CIA paramilitary officers in early 1982, shortly after President Reagan authorized start of the covert operation against Nicaragua in December 1981.

"There were always two tracks," said the official—the publicly stated CIA objective of interdicting weapons going from Nicaragua to leftist Salvadoran guerrillas, and the over-

throw of the Sandinista government.

But an administration official said the plan proposing large-scale U.S. backing for the rebels never was approved and was "so absurd everyone laughed at it." He said the plan was only an attempt to show, "in theory, what we could do."

This official, who also demanded anonymity, argued that the CIA's refusal to provide the Nicaraguan rebels with sufficient military supplies to overthrow the government was proof that the administration never intended to oust the Sandinistas.

"It was a nonplan," one official said. "They [the authors] were sent back to the drawing board."

But in his toughest statement of his Nicaraguan policy to date, Reagan said at his news conference Thursday that he is seeking the removal of the Sandinista regime un-

less it brings the rebels into the government and changes its policies.

Denouncing the current government as a "communist, totalitarian state," Reagan urged resumption of U.S. aid to the rebels, whom he called "freedom fighters." A congressional ban on aiding the rebels expires Thursday.

The first official said the timetable was about a half-dozen pages long and set out projected month-by-month growth of the CIA-backed army up to the end of 1983 when the anti-Sandinista rebels were to march into Managua and seize power.

The official said the timetable was placed in a file that contained major policy statements about the covert operation and was shown to key CIA personnel working on Nic-

aragua months after it was written. He added that CIA Director William J. Casey knew of the document.

He said the ouster plan was discarded only when the CIA recognized in the spring of 1983 that the rebels could still not mount a serious challenge to the Sandinista government. He said it then became "clear that [the timetable] was all pie in the sky."

CIA spokesman George Lauder refused comment about the purported timetable.

In secret testimony before congressional oversight committees in 1982, Casey denied that the covert operation was intended to oust the Sandinista government, according to administration and congressional officials.